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Introduction

Eve Blau

1 In the last three decades or so, architectural history, along with a range of other cultural fields and academic disciplines from sociology and anthropology to literary and media theory, has taken a decidedly "spatial turn." Spatial concepts and metaphors borrowed from the physical sciences, from geography, topography, and topology proliferate today in the cultural discourses of architecture and urban history, as they do in a range of other disciplines, as conceptual tools for thinking about the increasingly complex and differentiated contemporary world and its historical matrix.

2 Of course, architecture and the historical study of the built environment have always been concerned with space and spatiality. Indeed, the foundational texts of the discipline of art history—by the German art theorists Adolf von Hildebrand, August Schmarzow, Alois Riegl, and Heinrich Wölfflin (among others)—put forward theories of artistic perception and formation in the last decade of the nineteenth century that were predicated on an understanding of architectural creation as not only a formal construct, but also a "spatial construct."[1] All of these theories (which differed considerably from each other) moved away from the Kantian conception of space as an absolute category, towards a conception of space as relational and contingent; that is, as both subjectively and objectively constituted over time and, therefore, in a perpetual state of "becoming." These theories were foundational not only for the discipline of architectural history, but also for theorizing modern architecture in the early twentieth century, and, in particular, for the conception of modern architectural space itself as dynamic and mutable—a combination of "space-time," to use Sigfried Giedion's term.[2]

3 But the late twentieth century "spatial turn" in architectural history with which this plenary session is concerned, is not part of that evolution. Instead its impetus can be said to have come from outside the discipline of architectural history, from philosophy, the social sciences (sociology and anthropology in particular), political and urban geography; from the critical study of space—its ideologies, modes of production, and operations—in those disciplines. In this context, the writings of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault in the early 1970s—on the social production of space, relationships

between space and power, and the heterology of space itself—were enormously influential on social thought, critical theory, and cultural studies generally.[3] They were also instrumental in the reconceptualization of geography in the 1980s to engage issues of political economy and to explore the processes by which specific urban sites are produced by David Harvey and Edward Soja (among others), which have in turn, significantly impacted urban architectural thought and history.[4]

4 Indeed, one of the distinctive features of the "spatial turn" in our field in the past two decades is the permeation of architectural discourses (historical and theoretical) with the spatialized vocabulary of geography. "Margins, borders, boundaries, terrain, field, and territory," as well as "surveying, plotting, mapping" and so on have become the means of describing a broad range of socio-spatial conditions and relationships in architectural history. It is interesting and significant in this context that geographers, in particular Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift in a recent anthology of essays, *Thinking Space*, maintain that the appropriation of geographical concepts and metaphors by other disciplines, including architecture, is not in fact an indication of a "geographical turn" in those disciplines. Often the spatialized vocabulary of geography is deployed in cultural studies, including architecture, "to sustain and enable various theoretical maneuvers" unrelated and "resolutely ignorant of geographers and geography as a discipline."[5]

5 This suggests a more general point about the "extra-territorial" appropriations involved in the spatial turn in architectural history as well as in other cognate fields of study. On one level, the turn itself is an indication of the porous boundaries between disciplines today.

6 On another level, however, it can also be taken as an indication of the "pluri-disciplinary" importance of space or spatiality as a particular kind of knowledge that sheds light on a range of social, cultural, and political issues and concerns.

7 Spatial study or spatiality, no matter how differently it is conceived in the context of different disciplines, produces a kind of knowledge that has to do with relationships—among processes, objects, intellectual and material structures and systems, and so on—relationships such as proximity, distance, tangency, juxtaposition, and so on, that are essentially spatial and that are bound up with ways of knowing and producing knowledge in that discipline. Spatiality, one might say, is a representational strategy for understanding relationships, both synchronic and diachronic, among things, processes, and systems that are dynamic and mutable. Certainly, it seems to me, this is one reason that spatial study has permeated so many aspects of social and historical thought, and resonates so broadly today as a means of understanding the unstable and increasingly complex differentiation of the contemporary world—in which the geopolitical map is constantly being redrawn—as the contours and national borders of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas shift, fall away, and reemerge in new configurations.

8 The question for us in this session is: How does spatial thought signify in the discipline of architectural history? Or to put it another way: What kinds of knowledge does spatial thought produce in architectural history? At the same time, as the title of this plenary session denotes, our concern is not only with space, but with "spatial boundary" with "*limites territoriales*," in other words, with territory, boundary, and territoriality. Our concern, therefore, is with the political properties attributed to territory: with

questions of agency and with ways in which theoretical and methodological conceptions of space and spatiality have illuminated relationships between social processes and built form. Our concern is also with how those insights have expanded, reshaped, or otherwise changed the disciplinary contours of the field of architectural history.

9 The six papers delivered in the session (summarized below) approach this topic from a variety of different historical and critical-theoretical vantage points. Sandra Weddle employs historical methods and anthropological frameworks to analyze the role of architecture in religious ritual in Renaissance Florence. Krista De Jonge examines the operative implications of shifting political alliances and territorial boundaries for conceptions of artistic boundaries in the historiography of Early Modern Netherlandish architecture; while Jean Guillaume suggests that relationships between center and periphery in sixteenth century France are best illuminated by close formal analysis, which can then become the datum for comparative study. In the modern period, Greg Hise proposes that the proper scale for understanding space and spatial operations in architecture and the historical study of the built environment (as opposed to geography, anthropology, cultural studies, and other related fields) is the "mezzo-scale" of the state and its instruments, a scale that occupies a mid-zone between the abstract macro-scale of economic geography and the lived micro-scale of the everyday. By contrast Tom McDonough engages the terms of Henri Lefebvre's theoretical conception of the social production of space, to suggest that an examination of the rationalization of space in economic mapping in the 1930s can provide valuable insights into the codes and practices of modern spatial planning, in which the "abstract space" of economic models was arguably figured. Talinn Grigor engages the spatiality of architectural historiography itself, as she examines the impact of turn-of-the-(twentieth)-century *Orient or Rome* debate on the origins of Western art, on both modern architectural practice in Persia and concepts of national identity in the early twentieth century modernizing state of Iran.

10 In all of these discussions of "spatial boundaries" in architectural studies, the concern is with relations of power, with understanding relationships between social and spatial practices—whether they be rituals, economic mapping, the establishment of geopolitical borders, nation building, or the construction of historical narratives or of national and/or ethnic identities. In each case, the problematic in terms of methodology is to construct conceptually what John Coolidge called, "a bridge between ideas and formal organization"; to theorize the way in which "buildings are affected by ideas."[6] In each case spatiality operates as a critical tool. Central to all of the papers is the notion that space is historically produced and (as such) both shapes and is itself shaped by social practice; spatial structures such as architecture do not merely represent (or reify) political and social practices, they also condition those practices.

11 Spatialization of the political and social gives architectural and urban structures a particular form of agency. In the organization, use, and representation of space in architecture social and spatial practices would seem most clearly to intersect with each other and with the dynamics of history. Henri Lefebvre described the relationship among spatiality, historicality, and sociality in terms of "*une dialectique de triplicité*", a transdisciplinary triple dialectic through which space itself is produced.[7] It would seem that architecture and the city might be understood to constitute physical sites in which social processes and spatial practices converge and that a form of knowledge that is

specific to architecture might emerge—and where the instrumental function of spatial structures such as architecture can be found to operate.

NOTES DE FIN

1. Adolf von HILDEBRAND, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*, Strasbourg, 1893; August SCHMARZOW, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*, Leipzig, 1893; Alois RIEGL, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, Berlin, 1893; Heinrich WÖLFFLIN, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, Munich, 1915.
2. Siegfried GIEDION, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1941.
3. Henri LEFEBVRE, *La production de l'espace*, Paris, 1974; Michel FOUCAULT, *Surveiller et punir : naissance de la prison*, Paris, 1975, among other texts. See also, Mike CRANG and Nigel THRIFT, *Thinking Space*, London and New York, 2000.
4. See for example, David HARVEY, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, Baltimore, 1985; Edward SOJA, Postmodern Geographies, London and New York, 1989.
5. CRANG and THRIFT, *Thinking Space*, p. XI.
6. John COOLIDGE, "Preliminary Steps Towards 'The New History of Architecture,'" *Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians*, 3 (July 1943): pp. 8–9.
7. Henri LEFEBVRE, *The Production of Space*, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991, pp. 38–39.

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